

Kennedy Assassination Records Report Press Conference

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The board charged with identifying and making available all records related to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy presented its final report to President Clinton today. Following their meeting with the president, Mr. Tunheim, chairman of the Assassination Records Review Board, and other members talked with reporters about the report. They took questions from the media.

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area a board charged with identifying and making available all records related to the assassination of President Kennedy presented its final report yesterday to President Clinton following the meeting members of the assassination records review board spoke with reporters outside the White House their comments are about 15 minutes we have presented to President Clinton this morning the final report of our work which details our experiences in four and a half years of hunting for searching locating reviewing and releasing to the public the records of the tragic day in Dallas of November 22nd 1963 is a voluminous file and it is there with remarkably few redactions and available for the American public now to review in its entirety it we have had an extraordinary experience as the first group of outsiders who have had the authority to order declassification of government records particularly intelligence and law enforcement records and the president gratefully received our report we were very happy with the support he gave us throughout this entire effort and it is an effort unprecedented in American history to have Outsiders reviewing significant and sensitive government records and ordering release of virtually all of these materials I'm Anna Nelson I'm a member of the board and I teach history and American University it was a great interest to me to be on the board because I'm someone who because of my field of study has used to breed information a great deal and it was very interesting to to work for once to get documents open I think what we've done is really enrich the

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what we've done is really enrich the historical understanding of the period from 1961 264 when the Kennedy era basically was in the in the country's political center and we've gone far beyond the assassination itself in order to put it in some sort of a historical context it's a very valuable collection I want to emphasize the fact that they have four civilians five civilians really who were able to declassified documents the agencies could not stop us from looking into classifying if they did not agree with us they had to come to the White House focus the mind they have to do that why we really were a unique body and had some very unique experiences and we hope that we have convinced people in the government that it's not dangerous to allow records 30 35 years old to be in the public view I'm Kermit hall I'm dean of the college of humanities at The Ohio State University I really would like to send two messages to you the first messages that the president warmly embraced our report spoke enthusiastically about the need for openness in government confirmed the wisdom of appointing the board in the first place and underscored the necessity of committing the United States government to a long-term policy of opening records to the American people and the second is to remind all of you that while the board is going away today its work continues the echo of our efforts will be

heard literally for the next decade or longer but it also depends since some of these documents have been postponed in their release until the year 2017 in some cases earlier it depends on all of us to keep the people who are in the agencies feet to the fire so that when those

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feet to the fire so that when those dates come for documents to be open that they don't shirk their legal and constitutional responsibilities and really the world responsibility that's entailed in our act actions in making sure that the American public has the opportunity to come to terms with the issue of whether or not its own government participated in the murder of the President of the United States back in back in the early 1960s so I would urge all of you as the as time goes by here to remember that the legacy we presented to you is the legacy of openness and accountability in government and it needs to be sustained over time no matter how difficult circumstances may become my name is Bill Joyce I'm an associate university librarian in the Princeton University library today is our last day after four and a half years of effort to form a research collection at the National Archives that is still growing and has now attained the size of over four million pages this material not only sheds light on the assassination but on the entire period that is to say the context of the Cold War is illuminated in unprecedented detail as is the inner working of the government in a very tumultuous period in our history this collection will be years in the mining by researchers and it will take a very long time to augment understanding and to develop new more informed interpretations of what the imports of the period and the events that occurred during it another part of our work and the legacy one of the more important of our legacies is the precedent of what we have done is five outside Pat board members charged for the first time in American history to release records of the federal government that were previously restricted we have developed procedures and policies that might be applied to

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and policies that might be applied to other important issues other controversies that have arisen in terms of government behavior and we hope that the policies and procedures that we have developed might be applied and adapted whenever necessary to help resolve these controversies and at the same time to increase openness in government and as Kermit Hoja said to make government officials as accountable as possible and it's up to us to keep the pressure on now that the board has gone out of business to see to it that the obligations that have been undertaken and the promises to release records are fulfilled thank you many questions for us this morning yes go ahead we have to remember that this event occurred during the height of the Cold War and for that reason all records virtually on this event were sealed all the CIA's records were sealed the FBI records were sealed many for many many decades into the future there was a penchant for secrecy a desire to close everything off in the name of national security when the board reviewed these records and applied its balanced judgment we found little reason to continue to protect these records in fact many of them we found really should not have been protected during the 1960's but we do have to remember the era in which this occurred an era which national security concerns were heightened and caused the sealing of all of these important files they've done the materials that you've seen have you been able to draw any conclusions about who killed President Kennedy well I have to say first that our mandate was to find the records wherever they were so to the extent this was an investigation it was an investigation into where the records of the Kennedy assassination were and we found records in every nook

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were and we found records in every nook and cranny of the federal government and many records in private hands we did not find at least in my view records which conclusively proved either that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone gunman or that there was any particular conspiracy involved the records do however document the CIA's extensive search to see whether there were links to Cuba or the Soviet Union they also document the FBI's extensive search to see whether there were links to organized crime they provide tantalizing hints in those directions but in my view are nothing conclusive to shake the foundations of the original series check let me if I could just get add something to this if I may I think it's worth worth

remembering that we've had over 500 books written on the subject of the assassination of President Kennedy all of that work was done without the benefit of approximately 5 million records of which have been released in the space of the last two and a half years I think that all ought to make is very sober about more extravagant explanations of the assassination in any case what will occur now is the opportunity for people no matter what their views are to come to the materials in an honest and approachable way and for critics to really exchange use the other is worth noting in this regard is that the board made a valiant effort to secure records from Belarus and also from the former Soviet Union now Moscow we know Jack and I and our former executive director went to Belarus we went to Minsk we met with the KGB we saw the records they have about a stack of about 5 feet we weren't able to get those records out our relationship with the Belarusian government at the moment is not the best and hasn't been the best but more fundamentally those materials we believe are really essential to

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we believe are really essential to understanding Oswald and his life really two years in Minsk was intensively followed under surveillance the most personal intimate details of his life are contained in those records and we would hope over time that the Belarusian government and our state Department of National Archives or somebody can work out a deal to get copies of those in the National Archives we also know and we feel very strongly there are additional materials that are held in Moscow and we would hope again that through some efforts we would be able to get those materials and into our work as well we didn't have quite I think the level of success we would have liked to have had and working with an apartment of state but I know that over time that they'll give an even greater effort to helping us in that regard one of the one of the problems that arose with the investigations answer some questions there is that each time a group investigated Warren Commission the House Select Committee on the there was a Rockefeller Commission the church study the Frank church is committing all of these investigations then took their records and hid them put them away close the door on them so that in addition to the general suspicion of the agencies was a general suspicion of all the investigations and these needed to be released and that's something else I fact our statute required that we look at each and every one of them at least them for the most part we have we obviously protect the names of people who might be in jeopardy in various small things like that but I think that was a very important part of the suspicion the fact that nobody ever investigated and then let anybody ever see the records they used to investigate are you saying the Warren Commission didn't have and have all the information no the Warren Commission had only 18 months and they took what was given to them they took the records of CI he

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to them they took the records of CI he brought them and they took the records the FBI brought them and they concluded they were asked to conclude very quickly they were asked to conclude so that the country could settle down there was a lot of we know now from records in Lyndon Johnson library in other places that there was a great concern that this might there might be some element of inclusion been part of the Communists for example so the idea was to quickly get it over with and they moved very quickly in 18 months wasn't quite enough time to go out and do their own kind of investigation I think the next step I think we'd all agree is for people to use that collection it is very very well if there's a database it's the first collection the National Archives it has such a wonderful database so it can be searched it can be searched on the net and if people will use the collection and we'll start putting all the pieces together conspirators generally don't write it down but you can create a mosaic you can create from these records hopefully as Kermit Hall said a sense of what really happened rather than speculation of what might have happened and and I think we all agree that we hope that some of the records that we have noted should be released in five years some in 10 years should be monitored to make sure that them out and that people should look very closely to keep that mentality of openness around I think I just like to add that I think it's important to record that the board concluded its work we reviewed the

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concluded its work we reviewed the records that we were able to identify we survey the agencies very carefully we were able to review all of the records of the various government investigations so from that standpoint I think we can say that our work has been concluded in that respect however there are still likelihood that there may be yet additional records that may have been misfiled they may have been misplaced they may have been misunderstood there are in addition to that records that were redacted that for which the redactions ought to come off sometime between now and the year twenty seventeen when all of the records are released and we want to know that there is an advocate now that we are going out of business that there can be continuing attention to make sure that that information is released as it's scheduled to be I think what just a quick follow-up what will what will go on now is the extensive work of going through these files by individuals who are qualified to review them carefully and make conclusions from them I think that our legacy hopefully will also be that through this you new and unique method of reviewing records and ordering release that maybe we will taught some of these government agencies that it is better to be open than secret in many cases and that perhaps some more trust can be restored to a public that is is weary of lies that government may have made to them in the past so that one of the keep sightings of your committee was that it needs to be more openness in government and you said the president endorsed that today do you see any irony the fact that you're meeting with the president took place in secret well no I don't see any irony in that you know the president graciously made some time available on our schedule because he wanted to hear about our report I know he's got a busy schedule today and what we have tried to do as much of our work and open as possible we've conveyed to you really everything that was said by the President and its strong endorsement of

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President and its strong endorsement of our reporter did the president indicate that he might be helpful in trying to pry some of these documents the point with them from these agencies I I think he certainly is interested in in helping get the release of the foreign government files that we've been trying to find the issue was at for a while on his agenda with President Yeltsin earlier this month but conditions there really made that the request impossible at this time he does he is very supportive of the opening of these records his executive order demonstrates that on declassifying records the more than 25 years old and he indicated he would continue the push for opening the records of the federal government I just wanted to say that the records of the board itself constitute over 300 cubic feet of material and there was a great deal of information that up until now the investigations of the assassination have been secret those records were classified they were put away our records are out and available for the public in addition to the collection and people can evaluate our effort and see just what we've done and make their evaluations accordingly and I would hope that all of you who the next time a story comes about the assassination have the good sense to realize there now more than four million documents dealing with it that relates to some of the most secret activities of the government of the United States as they figured in the assassination and not let yourself be pushed around by people who have very complex and very exciting ideas about the assassination that may not necessarily have those rooted in the most current and most valuable materials that have been released with regard to the assassination thank you very much stopping copies yes

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that was

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